

## RAPE AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

**Bentina Alawari MATHIAS (PhD)**

Department of Sociology/Anthropology

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Email: mb.alawari@unizik.edu.ng

### **Abstract**

The objective of this paper is to briefly introduce rape as a social problem in Nigeria which has attracted scholarly attention of this *Special Edition of the Nigerian Journal of Social Problems and Social Policy Review*. Rape involves sexual penetration of a person without his or her consent by another and occurs all over the world. However, in recent times, the incidences of rape in Nigeria have risen tremendously especially during the COVID- 19 lockdown era. This paper briefly examines the meaning of rape, immediate and remote causes of rape, why rape cases are often under-reported in Nigeria and the effects of rape on victim's social life. The need for aggressive public enlightenment on dangers of rape, lighting up of streets and investment in education of the girl-child were canvassed as measures that could minimize the incidence of rape in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** rape, social problem, Nigerian society, perpetrator, victim, culture of silence

### **Introduction**

Rape is a common phenomenon that is found all over the world. Generally rape is understood to involve sexual penetration of a person by force and/or without that person's consent. Thus for an intercourse to be termed assault or rape, there must be evidence of force and non-acceptance of the victim. Rape is committed overwhelmingly by men and boys, usually against women and girls, and sometimes against other men and boys. Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre -CIRDDOC (2014) recognized rape as one of the human rights abuses others are violence in armed conflicts such as murder, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy. Rape is the violation of one of the fundamental Human Rights as contained in the different conventions and treaties which Nigeria is a signatory to; rights to freedom from fortune and cruel, under grading treatments or punishment (Nnonyelu, 2003) It is generally assumed that males are the perpetrators while females are victims. However there have been obvious cases where boys were gang raped by group of girls (Eagly, 2007).

Virtually all feminists agree that rape is a grave wrong, one too often ignored, mischaracterized, and legitimized. Feminists differ, however, about how the crime of rape is best understood, and about how rape should be combated both legally and socially. The radical feminists' perspective explains rape as product of patriarchy where men oppress women because of their perceived superiority

over them. In a patriarchal society man rape women and the women do not report. Husbands also rape their wives and it is socially accepted

However, there have been cases where young girls' gang raped a boy, so a girl or woman can rape a boy or man. Katie (2019) reported of a wife who handcuffed the husband and had intercourse with him. However acknowledging that a woman can rape a man does not entail denying that rape is frequently and systematically used to oppress women in a way that it is not used by women against men. Not only that, it is more serious offence to forcefully penetrate someone than to force someone to penetrate you. Also, women's sexual purity is socially more important than that of men.

In every rape incidence the issue of force and consent must be established. There must be evidence of force and non-acceptance of the move by the victims. The feminists have however argued that men are usually the perpetrators because they are bigger and stronger while the women are smaller and weaker (Davids, & Driel, 2005). Also under the legislative law of most developed nation, only a man can commit rape.

Cases of rape are usually underreported because of the stigma associated with it. Most often, victims and perpetrators are related as such the victims often bear the pain and consequences of rape. Ofoegbu (2004) recorded how a minor who followed the mother to the elder sister's house in order to assist her with her newborn baby was raped by the sister's husband. The family concealed the matter because they need to keep the family relationship. Some of the reasons people do not report rape includes:

- Fear of retaliation
- Uncertainty of whether the crime was committed or if the offender intended harm
- Not wanting the offender to get into trouble (especially when close relations are involved)
- Fear of prosecution
- Doubt in local law enforcement agents
- The recent argument that if a woman gets raped, it is her fault and that somehow she welcomed it.

The society on the other hand is not helping issues in the sense that it has a negative attitude towards rape victims. This is evidence in the reactions of the agents who are supposed to help rape victims.

The police see the victims as the cause of their predicaments. This is because; there are acts and actions that lead to rape. Thus, questions like: why were you at the place of the act? What were you doing there? Why should you be there

at that time? Why should you be there alone? Very often make the victims feel guilty and feel they are the criminal. The court will want to have evidence of forceful penetration. The medical examination may confirm the occurrence of intercourse but may not find evidence to corroborate the use of force especially if it is not the first time the victim had sexual intercourse. The media on the other hand had a very crude way of reporting rape cases. For instance, a story in Straits Times Newspaper of September, 26 1985 was titled "A woman, a victim in an armed robbery offered sex to two robbers" This is a rape case where a woman was raped by armed robbers, But the media reported it as if she voluntarily offered sex to the robbers. Friends of the victims desert them and stigmatize them. The family shuns them especially if they feel the incidence occurred because of their carelessness. The only support a rape victim has is from social workers and humanitarian organizations (NGOs)

**Effects of Rape on the Victims Social Life** Rape is usually very traumatic for victims. Some of the effects of rape on victims include the followings:

- i. Loss of self-esteem: The victim loses her self-esteem. She feels guilty and hates herself. This is because women's sexual purity is socially more important than that of men.
- ii. Loss of friends and family: Friends and even family members blame her for what happened.
- iii. Victims may contract sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) like HIV AIDS
- iv. Loss of life goals and ambition: Where the victim is a minor or a student and gets pregnant from the rape, she will have to drop out of school due to stigma and shame. She will also need to take care of herself and the baby. These will led to losing her life goals and ambitions.
- v. Loss of life: Victims of rape has lost their lives during the process or committed suicide because of self-hatred of what was done to them or the feeling of how to face the world after such an ugly incidence. Other who became pregnant after rape may have died as a result of committing abortion in the hands of quacks or during child birth.

### **Factors that give rise to Rape**

There are several factors that can create a favourable environment for rape to occur. These factors can be classified under immediate and remote causes.

#### **(a) Immediate Causes of Rape**

**Poverty** is a window to various other factors. Poverty makes parents not to send their children to school but rather send them to hawk goods in the streets which invariably expose them to rape.

**Parental neglect** Especially when it involves minors. Some parents expose their children to rape by leaving their girl child in the custody of male neighbours.

**Carelessness** Any careless person can easily be a victim of rape.

### **(b) Remote Causes of Rape**

**Lack of self-control** People who do not have self-control and or cannot control their emotions can easily be pushed to commit rape,

**Setting boundaries at home** When parents fail to set boundaries between the girl child and boy child at an early age at home, the boy may grow up to commit rape at any slight opportunity.

**Watching pornographic films** Pornographic films accessed via television or internet; and reading of pornographic newspapers and magazines could expose the mind and prepare individuals to commit rape.

### **Conclusions / Measures to Control Rape as a Social Problem in Nigeria**

Rape is a crime which is usually committed against women; hence it is also referred to as sexual violence against women. Unfortunately the society blames the perpetrators or victims rather than societal order. When a girl is raped, it is usually very traumatic for her. She passes through emotional and psychological tremor. Thus, society can help to reduce the incidence of rape by making legislative policies to punish perpetrators.

Also, public enlightenment is a very critical tool in changing behavior, attitude, belief and value system of people. So enlightening the public on the dangers and consequences of rape will help to reduce the incidence.

Furthermore, lighting up walk ways and all blind ends on Nigeria's streets is a good strategy that could reduce the incidence of rape. Parents can also help by sending their children to school instead of sending them to the street to hawk. Educating the girl child will take her away from the street; remove her from being a domestic servant and all other places that expose her to sexual abuse.

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